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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRAZZAVILLE 000198

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SUBJECT: (C) CONGO-B/EU: PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION "NOT A PRIORITY FOR BRUSSELS"

CLASSIFIED BY: Alan Eastham, Ambassador, EXO, USDOS.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

1.(c) EU Ambassador Miguel Amado (Portuguese) told TDY poloff that although the EU had sent observers to monitor Congo-Brazzaville's 2002 elections, Brussels has decided not to do so for the July 12 presidential election. Several factors influenced the EU Commission's decision, starting with the reality that the EU has limited resources and cannot monitor every election. Second, the official story is that the EU normally only monitors elections when it is formally invited and the Brazzaville authorities did not invite the EU this time. In reality, Amado said, if the EU really wanted to send a monitoring team it probably could arrange the equivalent of an invitation.

2.(c) Most important, he said, Brussels does not believe conditions in Congo-Brazzaville are conducive for conducting free and fair elections-the National Commission for the Organization of Elections (CONEL) is clearly not independent of the government and the electoral rolls are flawed. There has been "no real positive evolution of the electoral process since 2002" and as a result, the Congolese elections are "not a priority for Brussels."

3.(SBU) Though the EU would not be sending observers, Amado noted that others would be taking up some of the slack. The African Union would be sending a ten-person team while a group from an African civil society NGO called the Observatoire de la Societe Civile Africaine pour la Democratie et l'Assistance Electorale (OSCADE) would be sending a group of 25. The largest contingent of observers is coming from an NGO affiliated with the Francophonie organization. In addition, the UNDP is providing two technical experts, one expert who is working at CONEL and the other who is working at the Direction General des Affaires Electorales (DGAE). The government, however, refused to provide visas to a small group from the Federation Internationale des Droits de l'Homme (FIDH) until after the elections.

4.(c) Amado said the French Embassy has a more accommodating point of view vis-à-vis the Congolese than the EU and that EU engagement with Brazzaville is separate from France's bilateral relations with Congo, but that on occasion they overlap. He noted that as part of Article 8 of the Contonou agreement between the EU and the African-Caribbean-Pacific (ACP), the EU engages in a regular dialogue with the Congolese government on matters of mutual interest, including human rights, corruption and other governance issues. The French ambassador is part of

the EU delegation in these meetings, but has made a conscious decision to "keep quiet." (COMMENT: More likely this is instructed from Paris. One of our other EU colleagues tells us that in EU meetings, when meeting with the Congolese opposition is mentioned, the French Ambassador "runs for the door." END COMMENT.)

5.(c) In addition to his observations on the election monitoring situation, Amado made a number of other comments on the Congolese situation during the election season.

--He thought the elections process would pass off relatively peacefully. Whatever their problems with President Sassou, the Congolese people are afraid of a return to civil war. Moreover, neither does the government, which had deployed a very strong police presence.

--The major opposition figures are not very different from Sassou himself. They are of the same generation, they were active in the Parti Congolais du Travail (PCT) when Congo was a one-party state, and they are all Masons. He thought none of them had a vision of Congo's future that was different from Sassou's.

--The top levels of the government is filled with people who have little technical competence and who are more interested in accompanying the president on his travels-and collecting per diem-than in running their ministries.

--He mused that perhaps EU assistance to Congo, which has been based heavily on support for health and transport infrastructure, might be more productively directed toward "human capital" and "capacity building," i.e. education to change this mindset.

--The economy is characterized by extensive corruption with all major business in the hands of the president and his family, the gap between rich and poor is growing, and all Congolese are penalized by an "inflation tax"-nine percent inflation has been eating away at their purchasing power. On the plus side, the government makes sure that civil servants and, especially, the security forces are well paid and paid on time.

--Congo's election, the outcome of which is not in much doubt, probably will not have much effect on stability and security. Much more problematic will be the maneuvering amongst the "sharks" around Sassou when he eventually passes from the scene.

6.(SBU) Amado looks forward to working with the US embassy during the elections process and hopes we could coordinate our observations and, perhaps, our statements.

7.(C) Comment: Without a strong EU monitoring presence and the FIDH human rights observers excluded, monitoring of the Congolese elections is left to African and Francophonie observers who are likely to devote little effort and have little influence on the conduct of the polls. With respect to the EU presence here, only France, Belgium, and Italy are present with bilateral missions (Germany and the UK, among others, cover Brazzaville from Kinshasa). There is a striking gap between the Commission's representative here and the bilateral missions; Ambassador Amado is a human rights advocate frustrated by the continual braking from Brussels and the hands-off attitude of the country missions here.

8.(U)Drafted by POL: FEhrenreich.

EASTHAM